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AUTHOR Ritchey, Elizabeth A.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the types of emotions elicited from individuals when they viewed anti-smoking posters and to determine the effectiveness of these posters in inhibiting or preventing smoking. College students were asked to evaluate ten anti-smoking posters according to their emotive response to them: 1) anger, 2) fear, 3) worry, 4) discomfort, 5) resentfulness, 6) offensiveness, 7) guilt, 8) amusement, 9) positiveness, and 10) poster is in poor taste. The students also rated the posters in terms of its effectiveness in stopping present and future smokers. It was concluded that funny anti-smoking posters are not effective deterrents, and posters that evoke negative feelings may be more effective for this age group. (Author/CJ)

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COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS of ANTI-SMOKING POSTERS

by

Elizabeth A. Ritchey, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor of Health Education
Division of Health, Physical Education and Recreation

College of Education

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Blacksburg, Va. 24061

(703) 961-5617

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Introduction

Recently the National Cancer Institute published information indicating that the anti-smoking messages aired on television and radio had been some of the most effective ingredients of anti-smoking campaigns. However the millions of dollars of free time from these media, donated in the late 1960's and early 1970's, is over[1]. Health agencies now deprived of their public service announcements must wisely use their limited funds for anti-smoking campaigns.

Mass media stop-smoking efforts tend not to be cost effective and it is unrealistic to expect people to change their smoking behavior merely from viewing or listening to an anti-smoking message[1]. It is a waste to use visual aids incorrectly, and cynicism and sarcasm are inappropriate according to McIlhenny[2]. Yet anti-smoking posters of this type have become an element of most agencies' anti-smoking campaigns and are seen displayed on campuses and in many public buildings.

Review of the literature indicates that there are several opinions as to what constitutes effective anti-smoking messages. Haynes, et al[3] found that students reported that television and other advertising media were least influential in discouraging their smoking. Michelson[4] found that appeals to fear and threats of future disease and death were especially ineffective with most adolescents. Baric[5] also reported that most studies have found fear-appeals and death threats in most cases to be ineffective in the long run. However, Insko et al[6] found that among non-smokers, high fear was more persuasive than low fear communications in preventing smoking. Worden et al[7] reported that anti-smoking messages should contain positive advice rather than being cute, satirical or negative. He also reported that women and non-smokers were especially interested in messages related to children being affected by

smokers and that preventive and precaution themes were highly rated. In a study done by Rogers[8] he found that a communication's effectiveness was related to the perceived efficacy of a recommended protective measure and not just to its ability to make one believe in a negative consequence of smoking. The use of cognitive dissonance was not considered particularly effective by several researchers[5,9], and Swinehart[10] found in his study that messages repeated too often became ineffective. Frequent repetition of a threatening message could produce hostility and greater rigidity in existing attitudes, and in those people who had decided to try to stop, it undermined motivation.

The purpose of this study was to determine if college students thought that posters would be effective in preventing someone from starting to smoke or in helping someone to stop smoking, and if they did, what type of poster was considered effective, and hence be worth the outlay of money needed to print and distribute these posters.

Methods and Procedures

Eighty-eight college students, 36 male and 52 female, aged 18-23 years from several health classes were asked to complete a questionnaire relating to smoking and to evaluate ten different anti-smoking posters. It was assumed these students were representative of the student population. A unit on smoking had not been discussed in classes. The posters were produced by Health and Welfare, Canada, and were typical of those used by various agencies concerned with smoking, both in Canada and the United States. The posters either had a picture only, or a picture with a slogan or dialogue. Poster number one depicted a balloon with a face smoking, with the implied message that it will explode when the cigarette burns down. Number two had a dejected-looking dog, leashed to a cigarette with the caption, "Isn't it a dog's life?". Number three stated that "monkey see, monkey do" with a monkey attempting to smoke. Number four had a smoking cat and the statement, "it might be different if you

had nine lives." Poster number five had a man before a firing squad turning down his chance for a last cigarette because he was trying to quit smoking. Number six had a smoking baby kangaroo in the pouch of a smoking mother kangaroo. In number seven a fish was about to bite a hook baited with a cigarette, and the statement was, "if you never bite you can never be hooked." Number eight had a puppet on strings controlled by cigarettes. Number nine had Sir Walter smoking a pipe with Indians and the implication that he didn't know any better, but we do. The tenth poster was a cigarette in the form of an open casket at a funeral. These posters are depicted in Figure 1.

The posters were mounted on walls and for each individual poster the students were asked to choose from ten statements the one that best described their reaction or feeling after viewing the poster. The possible choices were as follows: angers me, frightens me, worries me, makes me feel guilty, makes me feel resentful, offends me, makes me uncomfortable, amuses me, makes me feel good, poster is in poor taste. Additionally, the students were asked to rate each poster as to how effective they thought it would be in preventing someone from starting to smoke. The rating scale was: (1) very effective, (2) moderately effective, (3) not effective, and (4) would cause someone to start smoking. The students also were asked to rate each poster as to how effective they perceived it would be in causing a smoker to stop smoking. The rating scale was the same with the substitution of the statement "would make one more determined to smoke" for the fourth category.

A t-test was used to compare the smokers with the non-smokers on their ratings of perceived effectiveness of the posters in preventing the start of smoking and in aiding cessation of smoking. The chi square statistic was used to compare males and females in their ten possible reactions to each poster and also to compare their ratings as to perceived effectiveness in preventing smoking and effectiveness in stopping smoking. The level of significance was

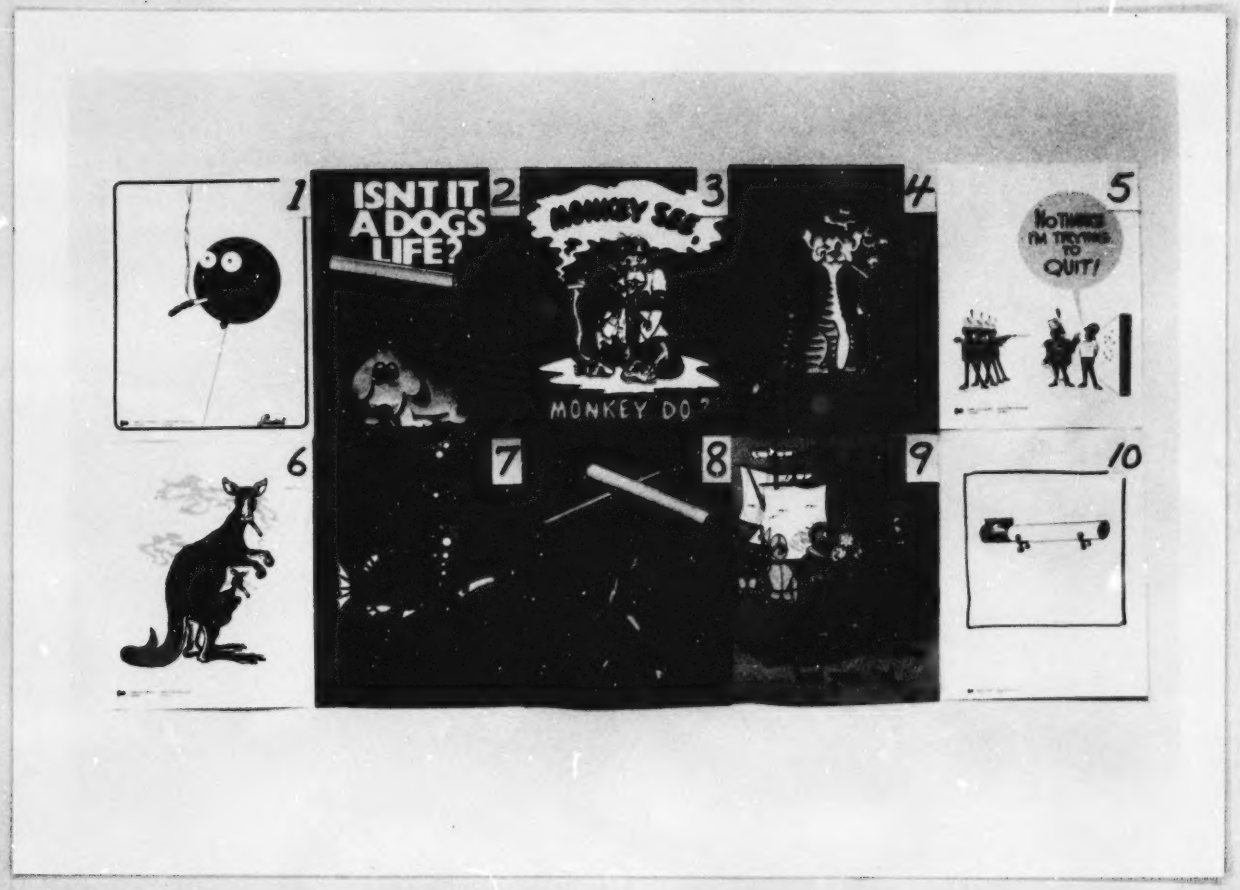

Figure 1. Ten Anti-Smoking Posters.

set at 0.05. Since only eight students used the fourth rating category it was dropped for analysis, and only very effective, moderately effective, and not effective categories were used. It is interesting to note that of the eight using the fourth category, five rated poster number seven, the fish biting the cigarette-baited hook, in this way.

Results

Examination of the data comparing smokers and non-smokers in how effective they perceived the ten posters to be in deterring the start of smoking behavior or aiding in causing a person to stop smoking, indicated that smokers rated the posters slightly less effective than non-smokers did; however, this difference was not significant. Since there were so few smokers in the sample ($n = 9$), it was deemed fruitless to do any further analysis with smokers and hence only the non-smoking students' data were examined and reported here.

When comparisons were made between males and females in their reactions or feelings evoked by viewing each poster, it was found that there were no significant differences between the two groups with the exception of their reaction to poster number ten, the cigarette in the form of a coffin ($p = 0.048$). Women more frequently chose the statements, "frightens me," "worries me," "makes me uncomfortable," than did men. Men more frequently selected "amuses me" than did women when describing this poster.

There was no significant differences found between males and females in their rating of the posters as to whether they perceived them to be effective in preventing the start of smoking. There also was no significant difference in these two groups in their rating of the perceived effectiveness in causing a person to quit smoking.

No attempt was made to correlate the type of response evoked by the poster with the degree of perceived effectiveness. However, several trends were noted. Six posters were considered amusing by over 50% of the subjects. Posters

judged least effective tended to be the ones chosen as most amusing. This is shown in Table 1. Only two posters, numbers eight and ten, were picked by more than 50% as being very effective in preventing the onset of smoking or in causing a smoker to stop. These posters, had a more diverse set of reactions than did the others and they tended to evoke negative emotions such as "frightens me", "worries me", "makes me uncomfortable" and "poster is in poor taste." Several other posters with the next highest percentages of students rating them "very effective" had some negative reactions, although not as diverse. This data is listed in Table 2.

Most of the ten categories of possible reactions were chosen by less than five percent of the students for each poster. Most of the posters evoked only one or two responses with any frequency. Students chose number ten, the coffin, as the most frightening (15.58%). Number six, the kangaroos, caused the most worry (25.68%), and number three, the monkey, caused the most guilt (5.41%). Poster eight, the puppet, made students uncomfortable (19.72%). Number one, the balloon, was considered most amusing (81.01%). Number seven, the fish, tended to make people feel good (24.66%), and number nine, Sir Walter and the Indians, was judged to be in poorest taste (18.06%).

Conclusions and Recommendations

From this limited study of non-smoking college students the following conclusions are summarized:

1. There was no significant difference between males and females in their reactions to anti-smoking posters.
2. There was no significant difference between males and females in the way they judged perceived effectiveness of the posters as a tool to prevent the onset of smoking behavior, or as an aid for smoking cessation.
3. The most amusing posters were considered the least effective, as was

Table 1. Percentage of Students Choosing Posters as Amusing and Their Effectiveness Ratings

Poster Number	% Choosing It As Amusing	% Choosing Moderate or Not Effective for Smoking Prevention	% Choosing Moderate or Not Effective for Smoking Cessation
		Moderate/Not	Moderate/Not
1	81.01	32.05/60.26	24.05/67.09
2	52.63	55.12/27.18	40.26/42.86
4	58.68	52.63/18.42	44.30/27.85
5	79.49	38.96/51.95	32.91/51.90
7	56.16	47.37/18.42	34.21/53.95
9	62.50	52.56/42.31	40.51/55.70

Table 2. Posters Rated Very Effective and Reactions Evoked by Percent

Poster Number	% Choosing Very Effective for Smoking Prevention	% Choosing Very Effecitve for Smoking Cessation	Reactions to Posters by %					
			Frightens	Worries	Makes Uncomfortable	Amuses	Feel Good	Makes Poor Taste
8	58.97	52.56	15.49	15.49	19.72	21.13	15.49	8.45
10	53.85	53.25	15.58	9.09	9.09	45.45	3.90	14.29
4	28.95	27.85	1.33	9.33	10.67	58.67	13.33	2.67
6	28.57	37.18	5.41	25.68	12.16	32.43	5.41	10.81
7	34.21	11.84	1.37	1.37	5.48	56.16	24.66	5.48

reported in the literature.

4. Posters considered the most effective evoked the most negative feelings, contrary to much of the literature.
5. Posters considered the most effective had the greatest variety of reactions reported by the students.
6. The type of poster rated most effective had themes that implied being out of control of ones life, death, or setting a bad example for younger people. This agrees with Inskos'[6] work with non-smokers.
7. Perceptions of the posters were highly individualistic in that what was in poor taste for one would be amusing or frightening for others.
8. Generally, the posters were not rated highly for effectiveness.

It would seem that the emphasis on cute, funny anti-smoking posters, which makes up the majority of this mass media approach, is a waste of money. If posters are to be used, ones that evoke negative feelings and that use the themes of death, influence on others, and that smoking controls the individual, would be more appropriate, at least for reinforcing the behavior of college age non-smokers. Constant confrontation by some of these posters may even be counterproductive. Money would be better spent on other anti-smoking activities that are aimed at the individualistic nature of various target populations.

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